

SELECTED NOTICES

New Writing, No. 3 Christmas 1939 (Hogarth Press 7/6 net) is a full throated swansong, with a hint of resurrection, of the bi-annual volume with which we are familiar. It is also one of the best, and though lacking in highlights has a general standard which permits no lapses. *New Writing* can be divided into (1) literary contributions and (2) its own special brand of nightmare reportage. Nightmares of authentic danger or poverty, of Fascist bullets, coalmines falling in, unemployment and starvation. The most effective of these are by John Lepper (death by Moors), B. L. Coombes (twenty tons of coal), Walter Allen (accidental murder), Sam Ross (no shoes), Lionel Davidson (aged seventeen) (stealing from hunger), and G. D. Skelton (stealing by mistake) . . . Miss Lewin's nightmare is of a day in a hospital, and Jan Petersen's of smuggling books into Germany. All these hit the soft spot. On the literary side Auden contributes one fine poem in American, MacNeice some of his lyrical journalism, Spender an unusual poem, and Plomer an amusing ballad. The criticism is dull except for an astonishing article about the futurist Maiakovsky, who may have been a great poet but must have been an intolerable man. More quotations would have helped. There is a good story by Pritchett, in the *Beany Eye* tradition, a nice article by Orwell on Marrakech, and some drear photographs including the inevitable group of Auden, Spender, and Isherwood without which any new magazine looks naked. Not the heights of other New Writings, and not the depths, excellent value for the money, and John Lehmann exhibits the conjuror's power by which he produces time after time unknown names who turn out articles both unusual and readable.

The British at Home by Pont. Collins 5/-. These drawings from Punch reveal an original artist whom one can compare with Thurber. An English Thurber, whose use of shading produces a muddy effect, through which loom realistic and gruesome faces of our Middle Class, the belles and beaux of the Blokeage. The jokes are subtle, the drawing excellent and entitle Pont of Punch to the front rank of English humorists. After laughing over his impressions of a cocktail party one realises that, with the best of Beachcomber or Gubbins, he is to be congratulated on the purity and brutality of his observation, and the total absence of that fashionable defect of English humour, the undercurrent of pathos. No Little Men here. Well worth buying.

Homes Sweet Homes by Osbert Lancaster. John Murray 6/-. This is a sequel to *From Pillar to Post*, and does for interior decoration what the companion volume did for architecture. Indispensable to anyone interested in the English home, these observant drawings which never overdo their subject, are a delight. They teach a great deal, though Mr. Lancaster is perhaps not sufficiently appreciative of the eighteenth century owing to his nostalgia for the nineteenth. His contempt for the age we live in is justified by his impressions of *Stockbroker Tudor*, *Functional*, *Curzon Street Baroque* etc. The letterpress is somewhat urbane and uneasy, except where a Mr. Chips interior such as *Anglican* is in question. An edition in colour of the two books in one with less letterpress is now essential. Perfect Christmas present.

The Blaze of Noon by Rayner Heppenstall. Secker & Warburg 7/6d. Novel (noticed by *Evening Standard* for its frankness), about the love life of a blind masseur in a Cornish manor. Excellent picture of English country life in decadence. The blind man, like a D. H. Lawrence night-watchman, prowls round the establishment finding the women unawakened and the men wanting. An irritating, sensitive, well-written book, where the womaniser writes

about his fellows with the contempt with which the military describe politicians, or the rich the poor. As social comment interesting, as a sexual boast, somewhat mystical, verbose, and humourless. Specimen dialogue. 'I said to myself "now she is one and indivisible, a whole" . . . she said "I feel whole, oh Louis, I am whole."' Introduction by Elisabeth Bowen.

Down River by John Lehmann: Cresset Press. 12/6d. Nostalgic reading for all Danube lovers, for those who know Vienna, Bratislava, Budapest, who have descended the Kazan and can convert Lei into Leva. This is a model for the travel book of the future, in which political, economical and human problems are equally mixed, and cemented by the love of the author for the country which he knows so well. It is marred by a most pedestrian style which renders the facts duller than they need be, and makes one concentrate on the descriptive passages. Plenty of good photographs make this a book which every mittel-european will delight to handle, and for the student of foreign affairs it is comprehensive and up to date.

The Patience of Maigret, by Georges Simenon. (Routledge 7/6 net). Should be a favourite not only with detective story fans, but also with everyone who knows and likes France. Quick-moving, slick and snappy, it towers above its English counterparts. Divided into two halves. First murder in Paris, second death at Concarneau. In both cases Maigret solves the problem to the satisfaction of the Sureté and ourselves. His method is patience, or the battle of nerves, and in the end the criminal almost turns the key on himself. Strongly recommended for its realism and characterisation, especially the first part which takes you into the bars of the Latin Quarter, out to cheap hotels in the suburbs, back to the *George V*. Simenon knows his Paris, and the people too. He presents them with a clarity and simplicity which makes him more satisfying to read than most novelists. The dust cover, by E. MacKnight Kauffer, deserves a special mention.

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